

DIVISIONS IN THE GUARD

Detroit Free Press

March 9, 1995 Thursday METRO FINAL EDITION

Copyright 1995 Detroit Free Press All Rights Reserved

Detroit Free Press

Found on Freep.com

Section: NWS; Pg. 1A

Length: 2197 words

Byline: DENNIS NIEMIEC Free Press Staff Writer

Body

Spec. Terrance Foster had heard enough.

As soldiers marched in a neighborhood near the Light Guard Armory in Detroit, one yelled: "This area is a jungle. Watch out for the spears!"

Others in leadership positions added racial comments.

Foster's first reaction was to fight. Instead, he said he filed a written complaint that day, identifying four men who had made comments.

That was nearly two years ago. Nobody has been disciplined and one of the men has been promoted, said Foster, 29, of Detroit.

In the Michigan National Guard, an institution charged with protecting Michigan residents in time of crisis, black soldiers say they are losing the war against racial discrimination.

"The black Guardsman feels like an outsider," said Maj. Emery Moss, who retired last year after handling minority complaints at **Selfridge** Air National Guard Base near Mt. Clemens for 15 years.

"Minorities don't feel a part of the upper ranks and that makes you feel like you're not a part of the Guard."

Guard officials, though, say they have received few formal discrimination complaints and have made progress in promoting black officers over the past four years.

More than one of every 10 Guard members in the state is black, but the upper ranks of full-time officers are virtually off-limits. Of the Army and Air National Guard's 68 highest-ranking full-time officers, only one is black.

In the Army Guard -- home to four of every five Guard members -- no black people are among the 27 full-time officers in the three highest ranks.

Twenty years ago, four full-time black officers worked in the upper ranks at the Guard's state command headquarters in Lansing. Today, there are none.

With virtually no black officers in the upper ranks, black soldiers say they have no advocates to turn to when their problems are ignored.

Erin Einhorn

DIVISIONS IN THE GUARD

Soldiers say complaints of discrimination and sexual harassment at the middle and lower ranks often are stonewalled by the chain of command, and many won't complain because of reprisals. And, a Free Press investigation revealed, some Guard units don't even have counselors to take the complaints, which violates Guard rules.

Frustrated Guard members have turned to an outside committee led by retired black military officers.

Maj. Gen. Gordon Stump, however, said the Guard has made big strides in promoting black officers since Gov. John Engler appointed him commander in 1991.

Stump appointed William Henderson, his friend and former military flying partner, as the first black brigadier general in the Air Guard. Stump also appointed four black battalion commanders in the Army Guard. When he took over, all 18 battalion commanders were white.

Last month, Stump announced the promotion of the first black general in the Michigan Army Guard -- Col. Larry Ware. The promotion will take effect in September when a general retires.

Ware, Henderson and the black battalion commanders all serve in part-time positions. More than 80 percent of Guard members serve part time, attending training drills one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer.

Few official complaints

"I'm extremely proud of what we've accomplished in Michigan," Stump said. "I think we can be held up against Guard units across the states for the progress we've made and the lack of problems we're having."

Engler is satisfied with how the Guard is run, said spokesman John Truscott, adding Stump "has done more in equal opportunity programs than previous adjutant generals."

The Michigan National Guard has 13,287 troops in its Army and Air divisions. In addition to nearly 1,600 black troops, the Guard has more than 400 other minority members.

With an annual budget of \$235 million, the Guard's primary role is to provide combat-ready forces in times of war. It also serves in times of civil disturbances and natural disasters and works with police in drug enforcement. It also participates in community service projects.

On paper, the Michigan National Guard has one of the best records on racial issues among Guards in the country: Since 1989, only five written complaints of racial discrimination have been filed. Most states average at least two or three per year.

Three of Michigan's cases were resolved to the agreement of both parties, one was found to be invalid and the other case is pending.

In one resolved case, a week after Sgt. 1C Tony Taylor moved into an office at the Olympia Armory in Detroit last year, he found a pile of garbage in front of his desk. The office had been locked.

Taylor filed a complaint. Guard officials say they determined the garbage had been dumped but couldn't determine who had broken in.

Stump said the low number of discrimination complaints is a sign the Michigan Guard is a united team that resolves problems at the lower levels in the chain of command.

The numbers may be deceiving.

The independent Minority Active and Retired Military Improvement Committee -- formed 15 years ago -- said it received more than 100 complaints of racial discrimination last year. It said most were unfounded but contacted Guard officials to seek resolutions of 30 complaints.

DIVISIONS IN THE GUARD

About half of them were resolved to the satisfaction of the Guard members, six are unresolved and the rest were found to be unfounded, according to retired Sgt. Maj. William Stigler, the chairman.

Stump said Guard members who take complaints to the watchdog committee haven't tried to solve their problems through proper channels. He said all complaints should be submitted at lower levels in the chain of command; the Guard has no record of complaints submitted at those levels.

Under federal law, military discrimination cases are handled differently than civilian complaints. Although civilians can go to court for damages, military cases must be handled internally, though the chain of command, and personnel cannot sue for damages or recoup attorneys fees.

"The complaints should not come to me," Stump said. "I'm not here to solve the problems" and equal opportunity complaints "of 15,000 people. Our system needs to be used."

Using the system, though, is not an easy proposition.

In its annual reports, the Michigan Guard counts only complaints that are in writing and come to the attention of the top brass at state headquarters.

But some Michigan Army Guard units -- such as the Light Guard Armory, the largest in the state -- do not have trained counselors to take complaints and help soldiers file the necessary paperwork. That violates Guard regulations.

"The chain of command hasn't taken the time to force that to happen," said Maj. James Sebree, the highest ranking full-time black officer in the Army Guard.

Some members say they do not report racial problems for fear of reprisals. "If you do nothing" about discrimination, "you may or may not survive," said Lt. Col. Lawrence **Millben**, 58, the first black person to enlist in the Michigan Air Guard and the highest-ranking full-time officer. "If you do something . . . you're going to be viewed as a militant."

Even for white people, there is pressure to keep their mouths shut.

Bill Austin, a civilian Guard worker at **Selfridge**, said he filed a safety complaint several years ago about how aircraft were painted in an enclosed area. After that, he said he has been passed over for promotions.

"Reprisals are very real for black and white," said Austin, 39, who is white. The painting was stopped, but "at great personal cost."

Many black Guard members say they have forsaken the system.

Foster, who's been in the Guard about six years, said his written complaint is buried in the chain of command. Stump said he was unaware of his claim, though watchdog committee members said they raised the issue in a private meeting in May.

"I'm still upset," said Foster, a security worker for GM.

The system also hasn't worked for Sgt. 1C Calvin Noble, 34, a Guard member for 15 years.

Noble said a captain kicked him in the behind nearly two years ago during training in Oklahoma. Noble said it occurred as he walked toward a 25-soldier formation he directed.

Noble, who is stationed at the Olympia Armory in Detroit, gave a statement to a supervisor in the unit. Nothing happened.

"A lot of people don't complain because they're scared it will affect their military career," Noble said. "It's true, but when he put his foot on me, that was the last straw."

DIVISIONS IN THE GUARD

Several members of the minority rights committee discussed their concerns with Stump and other top-ranking Guard leaders at the May meeting in Detroit.

Stigler said the group didn't receive a response to the issues it raised or the specific complaints from Guard members. Stump acknowledged the meeting but said he was unaware of any individual complaints.

An outsider's view

Selfridge, which houses the Guard and other military units, has been pockmarked by racial unrest.

A rash of complaints led to a 1988 Michigan Guard study that found instances of racial discrimination and said the base was not enforcing affirmative action.

In 1990, a study commissioned by the Air Guard found no evidence of racial discrimination but found strong perceptions of discrimination and a mistrust of equal opportunity programs. The study recommended increasing black and female representation in officer positions.

In 1992, Carl Lopez was hired for two years to evaluate operations and recommend changes. Lopez is an examiner for the prestigious state Quality Leadership Award, chosen to help judge companies throughout Michigan in areas of leadership, strategic planning, human resource development and management.

What he found at **Selfridge** shocked him. He said the problems in the Guard were "the products of an obsolete, broken system."

"It's a breeding ground for cronyism, nepotism, subtle forms of racism, sexism . . . all the isms are there," he said. "They treat everybody badly."

He declined to discuss specifics in his report or say why he left last fall. Guard officials said he was fired.

"He told the king he was naked and found himself on the street. You don't tell the king he's naked," said Troy attorney Richard Diehl, who in 10 years has handled more than 20 claims of racism, sexism and wrongful discharge from people in civilian Guard jobs.

When discrimination claims are documented, Stump says, the Guard looks at the severity of the incident in deciding punishment. But a discrimination-related complaint usually is not included in an officer's annual written evaluation because it could stop future promotions.

"Do you want to ruin the guy's career forever for making one comment?" Stump said. "Do you shoot everybody that goes out there that may make one wrong comment in his life and ruin his whole career?"

"You can write" an evaluation report "without saying this person is a racist and still . . . affect his career detrimentally. But maybe he can get over it in two, three or four years."

About two years ago, a task force was formed at **Selfridge** to address the concerns of minorities. It is directed by Henderson and includes officers, supervisors and employees.

Henderson said based on exit interviews to find out why employees leave, most of the racial problems have been in the lower ranks. The situation is improving, he said.

But not quickly enough for some who do not recommend the Guard to the younger generation.

When his oldest son considered a career in the Guard, Staff Sgt. Frank Gregory, who is black, cringed.

Gregory, 51, of River Rouge has two bachelor's degrees. He explained to his son how his 13-year career with the Guard at **Selfridge** has been a dead end job in an otherwise all-white aerospace systems shop. He told of the discrimination he had endured.

DIVISIONS IN THE GUARD

"Think about something else," he told his son.

On his father's advice, the young man didn't enlist.

(SIDEBAE:) TO BE HEARD

Guard members and relatives with specific problems can contact their state senator, representative or the Minority Active and Retired Military Improvement Committee, 19501 Robson, Detroit 48235. Retired Sgt. Maj. William Stigler is chairman.

Others with oversight of the Michigan National Guard include:

U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, member of Armed Services Committee; 1860 McNamara Building; Detroit 48226; call 1-313-226-6020

Gov. John Engler; the Olds Plaza Building; 111 S. Capitol Ave.; Lansing 48933; call 1-517-335-7858, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., voice mail other times

State Rep. Allen Lowe and state Sen. David Honigman chair committees with jurisdiction over the Guard. Write them at the State Capitol Building, Lansing 48913. Call Lowe at 1-517-373-0829, Honigman at 1-517-373-1758.

(SIDEBAR:) WHAT WE FOUND

* OPPORTUNITIES: Black troops make up more than 10 percent of the Guard, but only one black man is among the 68 top full-time officers.

* COMPLAINTS: Black and female Guard members say their discrimination complaints are stonewalled. A watchdog committee led by retired minority officers fields complaints but lacks authority.

* THE BRASS: Officials say they've made progress on promotions, and receive few formal complaints.

* INSIDE: Two full pages, including where to call and what could be done, 8-9A.

Notes

DIVISIONS IN THE GUARD: A FREE PRESS SPECIAL REPORT;

SEE CHART ON MICROFILM, Page 8A

Graphic

Photo Color CRAIG PORTER; Chart HANK SZERLAG;

:

Lt. Col. Lawrence Millben prepares to help preside over a veteran's funeral. He's the Guard's top full-time black officer, but is unhappy with they way he's been treated. See Page 9A.

DIVISIONS IN THE GUARD

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: RACE & ETHNICITY (90%); ARMED FORCES (90%); ARMIES (90%); MINORITY GROUPS (90%); DISCRIMINATION (89%); EMPLOYEE PROMOTIONS (89%); APPOINTMENTS (89%); RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT (77%); RACISM & XENOPHOBIA (77%); INVESTIGATIONS (76%); GENDER & SEX DISCRIMINATION (74%); SEXUAL HARASSMENT (69%); FREEDOM OF PRESS (61%); Guideline; Complaint; Discrimination; National Guard; Major Story; Criticism

Organization: MICHIGAN NATIONAL GUARD (61%)

Industry: ARMED FORCES (90%); ARMIES (90%)

Geographic: DETROIT, MI, USA (92%); LANSING, MI, USA (79%); MICHIGAN, USA (93%)

Load-Date: October 18, 2002

End of Document